The Impact of Othering on African Immigrants' Settlement in Australia

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Abstract
This paper aims to contribute to the literature on Black Africans in Australia. It seeks to do this by shedding light on the experiences of African immigrants living in South East Queensland. The paper draws on data findings from a recent study in Queensland. It discusses the process of othering and highlights the relevance of visible markers of ethnic group membership to African immigrants' settlement outcomes. By discussing the representation and othering of Africans in Australia, the paper indicates how othering practices can hold the potential to marginalise, isolate and exclude immigrants to Australia. Given the representation of Africans as visible "Others" and its consequences, the paper argues that what is required is a decisive ideological shift in thinking away from the colonialist frame that has traditionally informed perceptions of Africans to a postcolonial outlook that challenges racist assumptions and constructions of Africans.

Introduction
In Australia, African immigrants constitute a highly visible and rapidly growing immigrant group. As a relatively new and visible immigrant group, they are placed as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) in the context of a predominantly white Australia (Hebbani and Colic-Peisker 2012). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008) consider immigrants' visibility in terms of difference as a disadvantaging social fact. Here, "visibility" refers to characteristics such as ethnicity, race, language, or culture that distinguish immigrants from the dominant members of their host countries (Colic-Peisker 2009). These distinguishing factors can set social boundaries and can help maintain patterns of disadvantage in society (Healey 2014). Immigrants who are labelled and treated as 'Others' because of their visible racial and ethnic traits often experience marginalisation, isolation, decreased opportunities and exclusion (Johnson *et al* 2004).

Given the growing presence of Africans in Australia, this paper highlights the relevance of visible markers of ethnic group membership to African immigrants' settlement outcomes. While their legal statuses may vary, their blackness and visibility in relation to the white "Australian" [1] majority remains an important defining characteristic. Their blackness can single them out for discriminatory or differential treatment (Colic-Peisker 2009). For this reason, this paper examines the settlement experiences of African immigrants to Australia with a special focus on the impacts and implications of their representation and othering in Australia as visibly and culturally different immigrants.

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[1] The term **white Australian** is more satisfactory than oft-used concept of 'Anglo' Australians, because the category 'Anglo' and 'Anglo-Celtic' are not a dominant mode of self-categorisation by white Australians or by people who share the racial category 'white', at both a conscious or unconscious level. Additionally, it may not account for the many non-Anglos and Anglo-Celtics who can be defined as white persons on the grounds of sharing a common set of phenotypes (skin colour, hair texture, facial features) and trace their genealogical roots to Europe (Gallagher 2007).

The paper draws upon data findings from a study of African immigrants living in South East Queensland. The paper suggests that the othering of Africans is an important factor in the poor settlement outcomes of Africans in Australia. Social practices that construct the African racial and skin colour differences in terms of hierarchical otherness continue to limit opportunities for African immigrants.

Othering – What Is it?
Despite being a socially constructed concept, race has been the dominant means by which individuals and groups are labelled as "Others". The idea of race reinforces the distinction between the "Self" and "Other" such that the conflicting relationship between these two figures is integral to identity formation and self-awareness. One process of cultural racism is Othering, the overemphasis on difference (Essed 1991). For Tait (2013, p.57), the term is about "deciding who's in, who's out." It derives from hierarchical "us" and "them" thinking in which "them" is seen through negative stereotypes (MacNaughton, Davis and Smith 2009). Many people can be othered because of how they look (skin colour), speak (accent) or dress (cloth). Tait (2013) argues that othering is the main reason for racial inequality in society and can be seen in everyday power relations in schools, workplaces and in the street.

Several scholars have used the notion of othering to examine the experiences of visible immigrant groups with racism, marginalisation and exclusion in Australia (Henry-Waring 2008; Hatoss 2012; Ndhlovu 2013). Henry-Waring (2008) argues that there are meta-discourses of Otherness. These are highly pervasive sets of ideological constructions that shape attitudes, beliefs and actions prevalent in Australia and within which ideas about difference and diversity are created and refuse to be dismantled. It is within these discourses that whiteness is valorised as the norm. It is from the purview of whiteness that others are constructed, defined, scrutinised and controlled. The meta-discourses of Otherness act as hegemonic carriers of ideology and power and give primacy to Whiteness at the direct expense of those defined as the Other and conventionally configured as outsiders. The inclusion of certain immigrant groups in Australia comes at a cost because their difference is embedded in a context of Otherness (Ang 2001).

The discursive construction of ethnicity in Australia follows public discourses and a history of settlement that has *othered* and considered as *ethnics* certain visible immigrant groups other than White Europeans of Anglo-Celtic heritage who are considered as normative (Bryant and Pini 2010, p. 40). Despite the multiculturalism propagated by Australia, words like "difference", "race" and "minority" still refer to visible immigrants labelled as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD). As a result, despite their status as legal Australian citizens, persons who are visibly, culturally and linguistically diverse and living in Australia are positioned as different (Singh 1997) and constructed as others to the Australian 'Self' (Ang 2001).

African Racialisation in Australia
Some scholars have studied African racialisation in the Australian media. By 'racialisation,' I mean the cultural or political processes or situations wherein the idea of race is ideologically used as a means of explaining or understanding a group or an individual as different (Winant and Omi 1986; Windle 2008; Pierre 2010). For example, Udo-Ekpo (1999) contends that entry into the mainstream Australian labour market is a

significant problem for Black African immigrants to Australia as they experience daily racialisation and discrimination. As he articulates, there are five images of Africans constructed in the Australian media: Africans as unwanted migrants; victims; remarkable people; refugees; or fraudsters. Similarly, Windle (2008) found that Africans, especially Sudanese young people, are defined, characterised and racialised in Australian popular culture as a problem group and associated with violence. He suggests that patterns of reporting on African youth in Australia reveal how both the constraints under which the media operates and the wider sources of institutional racism contribute to new applications of racialising frames. For Anyanwu (2009), members of the African communities in Australia are hardly perceived as equal participants, but instead are treated with patronising sympathy. Ndhlovu (2013) makes the claim that the representation of people of African descent in Australia's media, as a problematic and non-desired 'Other,' is 'implicitly connected to discourses about Africa, the paradigms and politics through which the ideas of Africa and being "African" have been constructed and consumed, and sometimes condemned since European colonial imperialism' (p.12). Hickey-Moody (2013), for one, believes that media moral panics, especially about Africans in Australia suggest that they are a social disadvantage; a threat to peaceful forms of social cohesion. According to Hickey-Moody (2013), media moral panics are employed by the government to engineer social unity through creating a common enemy who is characterised, racialised and positioned as either at risk or a threat to public order or a drain on the taxpayer's dollar. Thus, it could be argued that the perceptions or images held about Black Africans to Australia in relation to Anglo-Australians, embodied in their skin colour, has significant substantial impact on their settlement outcomes. These negative perceptions or stereotypes can determine their position in Australian society.

Methodological Approach
The study was conducted in South East Queensland, Australia. Data was collected using questionnaires, participant observation and interviews. While this paper focuses on the interview accounts, the findings from the general data set that was gathered helped to inform the discussion and findings reported in this paper. Thirty participants were interviewed over a four-month period. The study participants consisted of ten African women and twenty African men between the ages of twenty-two and sixty-seven. It is important to state that these participants were selected purposefully. They were chosen because of their high levels of education and English proficiency, including substantial knowledge about the topic. The participants shared some similarities, notably their racialised "blackness". The interviews lasted for sixty minutes, during which participants' responses were probed while encouraging them to provide more details and clarification. The interviews were exploratory and stimulated the narration of experiences that would remain unexpressed within a questionnaire format. The textual data obtained after transcription were analysed using NVivo 11. The thematic approach adopted to analyse and interpret the interview data was useful for finding and identifying common thematic elements across the participants' interviews. Participants' accounts suggest that certain othering practices in the dominant system marginalised and excluded them. As black immigrants, they were often placed in the 'Other' category and constructed as different.

Research Findings

In the accounts of participants analysed, there is a suggestion that their difference is often overemphasised. If there is one experience many participants in this study can tell you about, it is the experience of being constantly racialised and constructed as the 'Other' to the Australian 'Self.' Many participants reported situations wherein people singled them out due to the difference attributed to their skin colour. They felt that they were reduced to their skin colour in everyday settings and interactions, which undermined their immigration status as legal Australian citizens. For example, according to Sandra –

> If you are a citizen, the colour of your skin shouldn't matter. But here, when they see me they will ask, where are you from? If I say, "I am from Brisbane", there is a laugh that will come. After that, they will ask, "what part of Africa are you from."

While this question may arise out of curiosity and may not have any racist undertones, it is a question about difference, one that is directed at them because of their skin colour. Another example comes from Bruno –

> When they see the skin, they identify you as an outsider…I don't think when a white person meets a white person they ask him, "where do you come from?"

Another participant, Josh, argued that –

> It is more pegged on the blacks. Even some people never agree you are Australian, because for them being an Australian you have to be white. They forget that there are so many people becoming Australian by the constitution, some born in Australia and some who acquire citizenship through application after living here for some years.

In fact, many participants felt that the implicit message communicated to them with the question, "where are you from", is that they are not Australians and do not belong in the imagined Australia. Instead, they are positioned as "Other", "foreigners" or "outsiders". Indeed, their positioning as outsiders in relation to Anglo-Australians, embodied in their accent or skin colour, determines their position in the power economy of communicative exchanges (Hebbani and Colic-Peisker 2012). The relevance of visibility for settlement, as Colic-Peisker (2009, p. 176) has argued, is that it marks out immigrants for differential, and often discriminatory treatment in their host countries. Discrimination based upon visible difference is the most important barrier to settlement, assimilation and integration of African immigrants (Hebbani and McNamara 2010). For example, Harry, another participant in this study, argued that his visibility in terms of racial, linguistic and cultural differences affected his settlement and integration processes. According to Harry, Africans in Australia have minimal chances of success because 'a black person is always seen as low class.' For this reason, he suggested that, "you will not get anything in this country, particularly, if you are a black African." Always being 'picked on' by his supervisors at work frustrated him. Harry used this phrase more than once in the interview to talk about his personal experiences of racialisation at the workplace as well as his children's experiences at school. In relation to his children's experiences, Harry said –

> Our kids are being picked on every time at schools. Kids are kids. If a kid is different, he or she is being teased out by the other students. The day she is teased

> at school, she will come back home crying to get comfort from the parents. It is worst with the kids, because they don't know the rules. If kids are picked on, the parents feel it.

This phrase, picked on, may have many associations. In Harry's comments, it sounds like he felt that they were bullied, intimidated and treated in negative ways. Some other participants felt the same way. For example, Katy felt that she was always picked on by her supervisor. In her words –

> When I was working in the nursing home, the nurse in charge was really trying to put me down and treat me differently. I tried to make her understand. Of course, I had a language problem, but I was doing well in my work. But all the time, she tries to blame me whenever there is a mistake.

Also, Dianna, a young university student and one of the young female participants in this study, commented that "people still based their judgment" on black skin colour. She argued that negative stereotypes against blacks restrict a lot of opportunities. The stereotypes associated with blackness can, of course, impact on African immigrants' settlement outcomes by creating barriers to success and access to opportunities and resources. These stereotypes are largely circulated through the mainstream media and institutions. They permeate books, news, tabloids, TV shows, movies, music, scholarly publications, laws and other media and create a virtual reality – a set of archetypes or well-told stories – that rings true in light of the hearer's stock of pre-existing stories (Delgado 2000; Henry and Tator 2002; van Dijk 1993). The impact of the media on people's knowledge and awareness cannot be underestimated. In many cases, it is precisely the media who formulate the public position regarding this or that ethnic group. For example, as Barbara explained that her people are "labelled as a bunch of gangs, drunkards, good for nothing…"

These stereotypes amount to a continuation of colonial ideologies of the African 'Other' (Mahadeo and McKinney 2007). Such negative representations of Africans in Australia do have an impact on their settlement outcomes. Unfair media representations have material effects on how Africans are understood in Australian society. They negatively impact on their social acceptance and participation in Australia (Ndhlovu 2013, p.12). These stereotypes can also affect their level of participation, engagement and motivation. The account of Bruno, a former Rwandan refugee, can help to illustrate this.

Bruno immigrated to Australia in 2003 from Zambia as a refugee. He lost his morale to engage in work, leisure activities and participate in the society, because of the stereotypes and discrimination he experienced. According to Bruno –

> My morale was very high when I arrived here because of warm welcoming by a case worker from a settlement organisation. They visited me every week, took me out and taught me the way of life in a new country. They took me to classes for enrolment and to Centrelink. I got money from the government which was not the case in Africa, for the government to give you an allowance that you are studying and integrating into a new country. They took my children for vaccination. I was amazed by this kind of government support. But it has decreased with time. When you see some of these stereotypes…psychologically, you become very weak. You lose interest to participate in your activity. You just withdraw from

> what you are doing because you are not going anywhere, and you feel powerless
> to do anything about it.

There are two points I want to highlight from this data extract above. Firstly, Bruno talked about his positive experiences of coming to Australia, the support provided by government agencies such as settlement organisations like Centrelink. However, he indicated that this support is not long term. Moreover, he suggested that he felt psychologically weakened by the stereotypical projections in his day-to-day interactions. This made him lose interest in life such that he did not want to participate in activities, leave the house, and go anywhere. He felt he was powerless to challenge these negative racialised projections. Bruno's account shows not only the change in morale from high to low among some African immigrants in their settlement journey in Australia, but also illustrates the significance of black visibility and the severity of the African immigrant experience of Othering. It captures the pain of being a victim of negative Othering. In fact, from the accounts and comments made by many participants, it can be inferred that being at the end of a stereotype-driven judgement can affect the lives and settlement outcomes of African immigrants. For example, Madison (2012) has argued that –

> For many marginalized identities and people of colour, they are known in a
> particular world through caricature and stereotypes. A major problem is that the
> stereotypical projection of one's identity by otherworldly constructions of who
> one is diminishes the complexity and humanity of one's individuality, as well as
> one's ethnicity or affiliated group. (p. 119)

Thus, it could be suggested that the stereotypical projections of African immigrants on the grounds of their skin colour have the potential not only to diminish the complexity and humanity of their individuality and their ethnicity, but to cast African immigrants on the fringes of society and away from society altogether. In short, othering practices constitute a major mechanism that contributes to social exclusion and marginalisation by racialising some people as the unremarkable default and others as different, undersirable and lesser (MacNaughton, Davis and Smith 2009, p. 37).

Discussion and Conclusion
Australia's story is one of the diversity of peoples. The African immigrants living in Australia, although a very diverse group, add an important chapter to Australia's immigration history. Their migration and settlement in Australia cannot be conceptualised without an understanding of their experiences of being Othered. This paper has drawn upon the accounts of participants to show that the Othering of immigrants from African nations in Australia can have important implications and challenges for their successful settlement. While the accounts of participants in this study are consistent with the findings of earlier studies on African immigrants to Australia, generalisations to a wider African immigrant population cannot be easily made. Although the sample size is adequate for the type of analysis undertaken in this paper, conclusions about the experiences of the participants in this paper cannot automatically be assumed to be relevant to all African immigrants to Australia. Any generalisations should be made with caution.

Indeed, the participants' accounts shed light on the experiences of African immigrants and contribute to the literature on Africans in Australia. The participants' stories indicate

that experiences of being Othered entail social disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusion. The participants' experiences also reveal something about everyday racist practices in the society. These racist practices happen at everyday level when negative assumptions are made about dark-skinned African immigrants in workplaces and society (Essed 1999; Ndhlovu 2013). These racist practices happen at the structural or institutional level when politicians, teachers or persons in positions of authority make discriminatory statements in the course of their normal everyday duties and when the media profile African youths (Windle 2008). Despite the end of White Australia and the introduction of anti-discriminatory immigration legislations, the fear discourses of the black 'Other' remain and are circulated in mainstream media, newspapers, and political speeches. The everydayness of these discourses, including their resultant experiences in the lives of Africans, has a tremendous impact on their settlement in Australia. The everydayness of these discourses reinforces unequal relations in Australian society, which impedes Africans' full participation and upward social mobility.

The Othering of African immigrants to Australia can also lead to stress, depression, frustration, isolation and disappointment (Johnson *et al* 2004). It can impact on how they see themselves. When subjected to negative Othering in an ongoing fashion, it affects the Othered who come to accept their marginalised position, avoid integration and participation, and lose self-esteem, confidence and morale. Indeed, those who have experienced discrimination and those who feel unwelcome are less likely to engage and seek appropriate help. Hence, when Black African immigrants in Australia are constructed differently, misjudged or positioned as the Other, their futures, wellbeing, jobs, careers and incomes, including opportunities for social mobility are at stake.

The skin colour that makes African immigrants distinct carries implications for their status and advancement in Australia. As the accounts of participants presented in this paper indicate, the social construction of black skin colour and black identity continue to impact and present significant limitations to their advancement in different ways. The black skin colour can be a significant factor leading to Othering. The black skin colour has historically enabled the categorisation of Africans. As part of the ideological rationale for slavery, blackness was associated with mental inferiority and defined as barbaric, savage, ugly and evil while whiteness was associated with superiority and defined as civilized, virtuous, and beautiful (Keith 2009). Racially, Africans are considered as "Blacks." This blackness is a problematic marker for many Africans in most white-dominated cultural systems and contexts because of the predetermined racial scripts attached to blackness (Mapedzahama *et al*. 2011). Therefore, due to the racial imaginary that valorises whiteness, Black African immigrants in Australia are more likely to be positioned as different, stereotyped, underestimated and marginalised. Orelus (2012) suggests that, irrespective of their social class and achievements, many individuals base their judgement on skin colour when they place an African in the "violent", "lazy", "savage" and "stupid" box. Unlike white immigrant groups, who are largely invisible nowadays and perceived as part of mainstream dominant group (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007), African immigrants' dark skin colour singles them out for labelling as "Others". African immigrants are more likely to be Othered and aligned with the racist negative stereotypical assumptions and symbolic values associated with dark skin. According to Lewin (2005), 'the racist framework of the history of colonisation in Australia clearly indicates that being "black" or "coloured" constitutes a disadvantage in

society' (p. 638). As the black "Other" to the Australian white "Self", African immigrants are more likely to be excluded from full participation and membership in the Australian environment.

The symbolic value of African immigrants' skin colour can be seen in settings where not being white is despised and equated with a lower social status. It can also be seen in settings where racial hierarchy and related racism and discrimination are maintained and reproduced by overemphasising skin colour differences. Therefore, the historical importance of blackness to African immigrants' social, economic and personal well-being highlights the need to recognise African immigrants' blackness as a source of disadvantage. According to Mapedzahama *et al* (2011), black skin colour not only stigmatises Africans, but it also places them at the bottom of the rank in a predetermined racial hierarchy and subjects them to informal white surveillance. Thus, given the representation of Africans as visible "Others" and its consequences, the findings of this paper necessitate a decisive ideological shift away from the colonialist frame that has traditionally informed perceptions of Africans to a postcolonial outlook that not only challenges the racist assumptions and constructions of African difference, but perpetuate the marginalisation and exclusion of the African subject. What is likely to improve the representation of Black African immigrants to Australia over time is positive media coverage and representation of Africans in Australia; good politicians; educators who can help prevent the objectification of African people in Australia, and; further development of multicultural principles in Australia. As Forrest and Dunn (in Hebbani and Colic-Peisker 2012) suggested, multiculturalism has already created a discourse where Anglo privilege has diminished and where there is an opening within the dominant imaginary in which non-Anglo Australians like Black Africans can be included.

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